

# **When two grammars coincide: Malay-English code-switching in public on-line discussion forum texts**

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## **Abstract**

Although a significant amount of research has been conducted into Malay-English code-switching or language alternation, as yet there have been very few studies of such alternation in on-line contexts.

This paper presents the results of ongoing research into the use of Malay and English by Bruneians posting messages on asynchronous on-line discussion forums.

The paper addresses two major research questions:

- how much language alternation occurs in the postings, as opposed to monolingual texts;
- how the language alternation is achieved, in areas where Malay and English grammar display a lack of congruence.

The first of these questions is addressed through analysis of language choice in a corpus of texts from two Brunei discussion forums. Findings show an almost even split between monolingual texts and those showing a measure of language alternation.

For the second research question, the paper investigates three specific areas where Malay and English grammatical subsystems display a lack of congruence: noun-phrase constituent order, and nominal and verbal inflectional morphology.

The discussion section relates the findings to arguments among code-switching theorists: whether the roles of the languages in codeswitching are always asymmetric, with one language supplying the grammatical frame and the other contributing content morphemes, or whether both languages can contribute in equal measure to both the grammatical structure and the meaning of the text.

## **Introduction**

This paper aims to break new ground by investigating Malay-English language alternation in the context of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in Negara Brunei Darussalam. This is in contrast to previous research, which has mostly studied language alternation (*alias* code switching, the use of more than one language within the same sentence or utterance) in face-to-face informal conversations. It presents the results of ongoing research into the use of Malay and English by Bruneians posting messages on asynchronous on-line discussion forums.

The paper addresses two major research questions:

- How much language alternation occurs in the postings, and how many texts

are monolingual Malay or English?

- How is the language alternation achieved, especially in areas where Malay and English grammars display a lack of congruence?

As well as the narrow focus on the grammar of language alternation, patterns of language choice are investigated in order to address both these research questions. Language choice refers to whether the participants choose Malay or English for their online postings, whilst lexical choice is the question of which language they choose for referring to the same item in a series of related postings. This discourse-pragmatic analysis is seen as complementary, as it situates the texts in their sociocultural context of the CMC output of Malay-English bilingual Bruneians.

### **Theories of language alternation**

Among a number of theoretical approaches which have been devised to account for code mixing and code switching, the Matrix Language-Frame (MLF) model, originally outlined by Myers Scotton (1993), has proved one of the most durable. This model posits a Matrix Language, which supplies the morphosyntactic frame, and an Embedded Language, which is the source for lexis. Through a series of restatements and refinements of the MLF theory, the basic asymmetry in the roles of the languages is consistently asserted (e.g. Myers Scotton, 1997, p. 247; Myers Scotton, 2002, p.15; Myers Scotton, 2006, pp. 243-250).

Bentahila and Davies (1998), however, claim that the relationship between the contributing languages is not necessarily asymmetric, and that both languages can play an equal part in contributing to the morphosyntax of code-mixed texts. This is exemplified with reference to French and Moroccan Arabic mixed text. Jacobson (2001a) provides further examples of equal mixing in Spanish-English and Malay-English texts, and proposes that the term 'language alternation' (LA) be applied in such instances.

Jacobson (2001b), in a study of the pragmatics of Malay-English code switching in Malaysia, makes an important claim about grammatical structure in noun phrases:

...where both languages are joined together, it is often the Malay grammatical

structure that determines the outcome, as in *kategori interdisiplinary, kursus major, grade yang baik, thought ini* where speakers follow in all instances the Malay word order of adjectives following, and not preceding, nouns.

(Jacobson, 2001b, p.189)

The questions of equal and unequal LA, and the more specific question of noun phrase structure, are further investigated in this paper. Instead of the Matrix-Embedded language asymmetry at the level of the “projection of complementizer” used by Myers Scotton (2002, pp. 54-57), texts are classified as either ‘main language-Malay’ or ‘main language-English’, by means of a word-count similar to that used by Bentahila and Davies and by Jacobson.

### **The context: CMC in Negara Brunei Darussalam**

Negara Brunei Darussalam (henceforth Brunei) is a Malay Islamic monarchy on the north-west coast of the island of Borneo, with a total population of 393,600, (<http://www.world-gazetteer.com>, accessed 2 March 2006). Malays and other indigenous groups form about 73% of this total, with 15% Chinese and 12% ‘others’, mostly expatriate workers. Malay (Bahasa Melayu) is the national and official language, and the main lingua franca, although English also fulfils this function in some commercial domains, especially in the national capital, Bandar Seri Begawan.

Since 1985, one year after the resumption of full independence, a bilingual system of education has been in place, with some subjects studied through the medium of Malay and others through English-medium. The proportion of English-medium subjects increases as students progress through the system from primary to tertiary level. Thanks to its advanced level of economic development, fuelled by exports of oil and natural gas, Brunei has a high level of internet connectivity.

Public online discussion forums have been available to Bruneians since the late 1990s, and are seen as a medium where current affairs can be discussed more openly, compared to other avenues such as letters to the editor in the print media. Participants prefer to use pseudonyms, especially when discussing topics which may be perceived as sensitive by regulatory authorities. A fuller description of the Brunei sociolinguistic context and the role of online discussion forums can be found in McLellan (2005), chapters 1 and 2

## **Methodology and rationale**

A corpus consisting of 211 messages posted on the ‘Bruclass’ and ‘Brudirect’ online discussion forums is analyzed in terms of grammatical and discoursal features, in order to determine the roles played by each of the contributing languages.

Initially the messages are classified into five categories, comparable to those used by Jacobson (1996, p. 85) for code-mixed spoken interaction. These comprise

- monolingual English (E-)
- main language-English with some Malay (ML-E)
- equal language alternation of Malay and English (=LA)
- main language-Malay with some English (ML-M)
- monolingual Malay (M-).

This broad classification enables an overview of language choice over the whole corpus.

For more detailed investigation, grammatical analysis is conducted at the level of the syntactic group, approximating to the clause. This investigation focuses on three areas where there is a lack of congruence, as defined by Sebba (1998), between Malay and English. These areas are

- noun phrase structure
- pluralization of nouns
- verb inflections

A corpus-based approach to the study of Malay-English alternation allows more systematic investigation of the regularities and recurrent patterns, and leads to more substantial findings, beyond a mere statement of fact that LA does occur in Brunei on-line discussion forums. This reduces the risk inherent in making statements about constraints and about possible switching points based on limited evidence, as these statements can be challenged by reference to a single counterexample. Use of a corpus also allows for attention to be paid to monolingual postings, not just to extracts from texts showing complex patterns of LA.

The perspective is then broadened to address questions of language choice and lexical choices within postings and within threads of postings on the same or related topics. Threaded sequences, where an initial posting on a new topic generates a series of responses, are a feature of discussion forums in the CMC domain.

## Findings

### Overview – Tabulations

Table 1 gives information about the four ‘tranches’ of postings from two websites: Bruclass (accessible via <http://www.bruclass.com/>, then clicking on ‘Asian community’), and Brudirect / Have your say (<http://www.bruneidirecthys.com/hys/index.php>)

Table 1

*Data Sets 1, 2, 3 & 4*

Set no.	Source	Dates	Number of postings	Total word-count
1	Bruclass	14/2/2001– 24/2/2001	64	7,686
2	Brudirect	16/8/2001– 18/8/2001	61	7,363
3	Bruclass	1/12/2001– 5/12/2001	46	11,168
4	Brudirect	2/12/2001– 5/12/2001	40	5,296
Totals:			<b>211</b>	<b>31,513</b>

Analysis of these 211 posting texts yields the following breakdown:

Table 2

*Presence / Absence of LA in Whole Corpus of 211 Postings*

Language classification	Number of postings	% of total
English only (E-)	83	39.3
Main-language English (ML-E)	36	17.1
= Language Alternation (=LA)	12	5.7
Main-language Malay (ML-M)	57	27.0
Malay only (M-)	23	10.9

Over the whole corpus there is a predominance of English over Malay as the choice for the main language, 56.4% to 37.9 %. In terms of monolingual against mixed-language postings there is an even split, 106 E- and M-, as against 105 showing some measure of alternation between languages.

On the basis of the findings outlined in Table 2, the presence of some degree of LA is the norm for ML-Malay postings, whereas monolingual English is the norm for ML-English postings, although a substantial minority of these show some form of LA.

The total of postings classified as '=LA' may appear small, but this is due to the counting system adopted, which sets strict criteria for inclusion. If the total of monolingual Malay or English groups (clauses) outnumbers the monolingual groups in the other language plus the mixed groups, then the text is designated ML-M or ML-E. Where this does not occur, then it is classified as =LA.

An example is text 2.58 in the corpus. This has eleven English-only groups, three mixed groups and nine Malay-only groups, and is thus classified =LA, since the mixed and Malay-only groups (12) together total more than the English-only groups:

[1] <sup>1</sup>  
**Auction stuff:** *Frankly speaking*,/1 baiktah jangan dibali barang2  
 good-DM NEG-IMP PASS-buy RDP-thing  
 yg kena \2 *auction* /3 atu, bukannya apa \4, *if we buy them, in a way, we are*  
 REL PASS DEM, NEG-3s-POSS what  
*helping those who have used* /5 duit ketani \6 *for their personal interest, to*  
 money lpi-POSS  
*pay for their debts.*/7 Mana tia yang dulu\8 *the famous* /97 org atu?  
 Where DM REL before ABBR-person DEM  
 Inda kedengaran.\10 *Has the trial started?? It's so sad, isn't it, how our beloved*  
 NEG hearing  
*country* /11 jadi cemani.  
 become like-DEM

Frankly speaking, it's better not to buy the things that are being auctioned, isn't it right, that if we buy them, in a way, we are helping those who have used our

money for their personal interest, to pay for their debts. Wherever are the famous seven people from before? We don't hear of them anymore. Has the trial started? It's so sad, isn't it, how our beloved country has come to this.

(Data source, posting 2.58)

<sup>1</sup>: See endnote for abbreviations and glossing conventions used in this paper

### **Analysis of three areas of non-congruence between Malay and English**

Analysis is conducted across three areas where the grammar of Malay is not congruent with that of English. These are

- i) noun phrase structure
- ii) pluralization of nouns
- iii) verb inflections

#### Noun phrase structure

In text 2.58 cited above, the mixed sentence “*Mana tia yang dulu the famous 7 org atu?* (translation: Wherever are the famous seven people from before?)” contains two switching points, before and after the English determiner and adjective. The mixed noun phrase shows the English modifier-head structure with the English determiner and adjective preceding the Malay noun (‘org’, an abbreviation for ‘orang’, ‘people’). But also evident is the Malay modifier-head pattern, with the Brunei Malay demonstrative adjective (‘atu’) following the head noun. Hence it is an instance of the grammar of both languages operating at phrase level.

Within the whole corpus as a whole there is a general tendency for noun phrases to predominate as alternation environments, and there are examples which show the Malay and the English constituent order. The figures are given in Table 3.

Table 3

#### *Mixed noun phrases*

<i>Noun phrase types</i>	<i>Tokens</i>
English noun phrases with English modifier-head word order in Main-language Malay environments	54

English noun phrases with Malay head-modifier word order in Main-language Malay environments	29
Malay noun phrases in Main-language English environments	13

These figures are consistent with the overall pattern of fewer Malay insertions in main language-English text, as compared to English insertions in main language-Malay text.

[2] Examples of English NPs retaining the modifier-head order in main-language Malay environments

a) Public transport balum lagi *effective*  
not yet again

public transport is not yet effective, (1.8)

b) Economic talk mu ani isi nya manis manis  
2sPOSS DEM content 3s-POSS RDP-sweet

the content of your economic talk is very sweet, (3.6)

c) carrying capacity kitani *overloaded* sudah  
1piPOSS already

our carrying capacity is already overloaded, (3.7)

It is evident that these are set phrases which collocate strongly. For [2a], the Malay translation equivalent ‘pengangkutan umum’, which occurs elsewhere in other Malay texts, would be a possible alternative choice. In all three examples here, it is noticeable that even with the English modifier-head NP structure, the influence of Malay grammar is also evident through the absence of a copula-verb. Hence these extracts are also examples where both languages are making contributions to the grammatical structure.

[3] Examples where English constituents occur with the Malay head-modifier order

a) Inda jua baik kalau kitani karang pepacah balah pasal issue terrorists atu  
NEG also good if 1pi later broken quarrel because DEM

It’s not good if we’re going to be in conflict over the terrorists issue, (3.15)

b) ...dalam pemajuan ekonomi (*particularly bisnes global*).

in development economic business

... in economic development (particularly global business), (3.27)

c] Kalau kan melihat body sexy bolehlah.  
If FUT AV-see can-DM

If you want to see sexy bodies you can, (4.4)

Example 3b] here is particularly striking, as the NP in parentheses “bisnes *global*” is preceded by an English intensifier, “particularly”. “Bisnes” and “ekonomi” are classified as Malay borrowings from English, since they display assimilation to Malay orthography.

Malay NPs in main-language English environments occur less frequently in the corpus. Examples include

[4]

a] *BAN pasar malam*  
market night

Ban the night market, (1.26)

b] *Concept MIB had suppressed certain group of individual especially puak2 lain*  
RDP-group other

the MIB concept has suppressed a certain group of individuals, especially other ethnic groups,  
(3.39)

c] *...and there is no more bangsa melayu*  
race Malay

and there is no more Malay race, (3.41)

Comparable to the examples in [2], these are all set phrases in Malay which collocate closely. “Pasar malam” occurs frequently in English speech among expatriates resident in Brunei in preference to the English equivalent ‘night market’. “Puak2 lain” shows the use of the numerical abbreviation for the plural reduplication: in more formal written text this would appear as “puak-puak lain”. 4b] and 4c] are further examples where both grammatical systems are operating. “Concept MIB” shows head-modifier NP order in 4b]; in 4c] “bangsa melayu” is a complement to the English copula verb.

### Pluralization of nouns

With plural marking of nouns, there is a comparable pattern of variability. There are fourteen examples where the English plural –s morpheme is retained on English nouns in main language-Malay contexts, and eleven examples where Malay reduplication is used with English nouns. In other places, on twelve occasions in total throughout the corpus, the plural morpheme is absent, thus resulting in the occurrence of unmodified ‘bare’ nouns. This is to be expected, as reduplication in Malay is not obligatory and tends not to occur when plural reference is retrievable from the discourse context. The corpus shows no examples of English plural morphemes affixed to Malay nouns.

Table 4

#### *Pluralization of nouns*

<i>Plural marking</i>	<i>Tokens</i>
English nouns with –s in main language-Malay contexts	14
English nouns with Malay reduplication in main language-Malay contexts	11
‘Bare’ English nouns phrases with plural reference in main language-Malay contexts	13
Malay nouns with English –s plural in main language-English contexts	-

Examples 5a] – 5c] show the English plural –s morpheme being retained on English nouns where the main language of the sentence and the text is Malay.

#### 5] Retention of English plural morpheme (-s) in main language Malay environments

- a] Jangan tah sabut benefits kerajaan Brunei  
NEG-IMP DM mention government

Don't mention the benefits to the Brunei government, (3.1)

- b] Kalau ada expats yang angan2 kan duduk di *position* #1, ....  
If have REL RDP-aspire DM sit in

If there are expats who aspire to occupy the #1 position,... (3.1)

- c] Sudah tah banyak rides yang rosak,

already DM many REL broken

There are already many rides not working. (4.34)

In these extracts, the English plural nouns ‘benefits’, ‘expats’ and ‘rides’ occur in contexts where the grammatical frame is supplied by Malay. In 6a] – 6c], the Malay plural marker, reduplication of the noun signaled by the figure ‘2’ in the text, is used with English nouns. These would thus be read as “manuscript-manuscript”, “issue-issue”, and “value-value”.

6] Malay plural reduplication used with English nouns

a] ...seperti manuscript2 atu.  
like DEM

...like those manuscripts. (2.57)

b] Tuduh menuduh, dan sampai tia tekeluar issue2 sensitive ugama.  
RDP-accuse and reach DM AV-arise religion

Making accusations to such an extent that sensitive religious issues arise. (3.15)

c] ..., tapi value2 yang positif seperti kehalusan...  
but REL positive like refinement

... but values which are positive such as refinement... (3.28)

Example 6c] here shows the Malay head-modifier order in the mixed NP. The examples in 7], by contrast, are not marked for pluralization in either language, and hence appear as ‘bare nouns’. The plurality is retrievable semantically from the context.

7]

a] BUKAN UNTOK SIMPAN ACCOUNT ORANG ORANG ISLAM  
NEG for keep RDP-person Islam

not for holding the accounts of people of the Islamic faith, (1.9, capitalization in original)

b] Saya ada terbaca dalam lain lain site  
1s have AV-read in RDP-other

I have read this in other sites, (2.7)

c] Membuat kurikulum, membuat exercise, membuat test

AV-do curriculum, AV-do AV-do

Making up the curriculum, making up exercises, making up tests, (3.1)

The evidence from noun phrases shows that there is variability in the extent of dominance of Malay head-modifier structure. Sometimes English modifier-head is maintained (“public transport”, “carrying capacity”). These groups, exemplified in [2] above, contravene Myers Scotton’s (2002, p. 59) revised criteria for identification of the matrix language, and in her analysis would presumably be categorized as “EL islands”. There are, however, also many cases of English nominal groups with the Malay head-modifier order (“body sexy” in [3c]). In the case of plurals there is likewise a slightly higher frequency of English nominals showing English ‘-s’ pluralization over those showing Malay reduplication. Many English nominals that would show plurality in a monolingual English group, however, appear as bare nouns in cases where plurality is retrievable from the textual context. Pluralization thus shows a similar pattern of variability to that found in NP structure.

### Verb inflections

With verb inflections a variable pattern similar to those of noun phrases can be observed. Verbs in Malay do not inflect for tense, which is marked adverbially (Cumming, 1991; Svalberg & Fatimah, 1998). In the corpus there are seventeen verbal groups which show retention of English inflections, auxiliaries, and the infinitive marker ‘to’. All of these are internally well-formed in English; three examples are given in 8].

8]

a] membuka ladang kah, *enjoying your pension*.., bagi tah chan orang yang muda  
AV-open farm INT give DM chance person REL young  
cultivating a farm maybe, enjoying your pension..., give a chance to our young people, (1.10)

b] *I’m sure* ada salah silapnya penjualan rumah tu  
have wrong mistake-3sPOSS sale house DEM  
I’m sure there were mistakes in the sale of that house, (2.22)

c] *Don’t you think* kitani macam ketulahan saja  
1pi like misfortune only  
Don’t you think we’re just like unfortunate people, (4.29)

As with the close collocations in the mixed NPs in 2] above, these would be classified as “EL islands” in Myers Scotton’s MLF theory.

There are twenty examples of verbal groups occurring in main language-Malay or equal language alternation environments which have uninflected English base-form verbs, and thus are located further along the continuum towards monolingual Malay. In these instances the Malay syntax is more dominant, resulting in non-occurrence of inflections or auxiliaries required by English.

9]

a] ...*ex minister* atu, kana remove from office due to this housing scheme  
DEM PASS

the ex-Minister was removed from office due to this housing scheme, (2.22)

b] jan kechewa sasudah membacha apa si Dato Huzair announce atu  
NEG-IMP disappoint after AV-read what DEM (name) DEM

Don’t be disappointed once you’ve read what Dato Huzair has announced, (3.17)

c] Ataupun macam mana kalau kitani start competition mencari kesalahan nya...  
or-DM like what if 1p AV-find error 3p-POSS

Or how about if we started a competition to find the errors in it... (4.39)

As with the NPs, there are fewer examples of Malay verb phrases occurring in main language-English environments: only five in the whole corpus. Two of these are given in 10].

10]

a] *Then at the end of time our population* jadi 0  
become

Then at the end of time our population will become zero, (1.31)

b] *so they prefer to* minum kopi  
drink coffee

So they prefer to drink coffee, (2.26)

There are no examples of Malay verbs with English bound morphemes.

Evidence from the mixed verbal groups exemplified here once again points towards variability, with a similar number of instances of retention of English inflections and verbal group order, as shown in example set 8], and instances where English verbs are not inflected or do not have infinitive markers or auxiliaries. Investigation of a larger corpus would of course yield more reliable findings in this area.

### **Language choice across threads of postings**

As well as grammatical analysis of areas of non-congruence, the use of a corpus of consecutive postings allows discursal investigation of language choice and lexical choice across threads of postings on the same topic. Patterns of both maintenance of a consistent choice of language, and alternation between different language choices, are found to occur within these threads. Table 3 presents an overview of the four tranches of postings which constitute the corpus for this study.

Table 5

#### *Threads of postings*

<i>Data Set &amp; total postings in each set</i>	<i>Number of threads</i>	<i>Number of postings within each thread</i>	<i>'Standalone' postings</i>
1 (64)	4	41 / 2 / 6 / 5 = 54	10
2 (61)	5	16 / 7 / 5 / 9 / 2 = 39	22
3 (46)	3	25 / 3 / 15 = 43	3
4 (40)	4	3 / 2 / 7 / 7 = 19	21

No consistent pattern is found for language choice within threads on the same topic, nor is there any identifiable pattern of language choice correlating with posting topic. The longest thread is the “Brunei – the best” thread of 41 postings in set 1. (Names are taken from the title of the initial posting in the respective thread). This thread contains examples of all five language choice categories, as shown in Table 4. The

same applies to the “Rumah Expo99” thread in set 2, which has 16 postings. The “BIA and Global” thread of 25 postings in set 3 includes postings in all categories except Malay-only. The “BB hearsay” thread, also in set 3, consists of 15 postings in all categories except main language-English.

Table 6

*Language choice in four threads*

Thread	Number of postings	Malay only (M-)	ML-M	= LA	ML-E	English only (E-)	Initial posting number & language	2 <sup>nd</sup> posting number & language
Brunei-the best (set 1)	41	2	9	3	12	15	1.1 E -	1.2 E-
Rumah Expo99 (set 2)	16	1	4	2	3	6	2.1 ML-M	2.3 E-
BIA and Global (set 3)	25	-	6	2	10	7	3.2 E-	3.4 E-
BB hearsay (set 3)	15	2	6	2	-	5	3.9 E-	3.10 E-

At a lower level within these threads there are patterns of lexical choice, lexical cohesion and collocational chains which occur within and between postings. The bilingual participants, replying to previous postings, are able to make choices about maintaining the same lexeme or switching to a synonym or near-synonym in the other language. In the “Brunei – the best” thread, the initial posting (numbered as 1.1) discusses the topic of concerts and live music being banned in Brunei. In this English-only text, the words ‘ban’ and ‘concerts’ are used. Throughout the thread this topic is continually recycled, and these English terms recur throughout, without translation. For instance, posting 1.38, classified as main language-Malay, contains this partial sentence

11]

...macam *concert* atu kalau ada hasrat kan mem*ban*, cara nya senang saja, *u*  
 like DEM. if have desire FUT AV-ban, way 3sPOSS easy only, 2p

kuatkan *rules and regulations* nya, ...  
 AV- enforce 3sPOSS

As for those concerts, if you want to ban them, it’s easy; you just enforce the rules and regulations,

This is a conscious choice to maintain these English lexemes on the part of the text producers, not the result of any lack of suitable terms in Malay for ‘concert’ and ‘ban’.

In contrast, in the “Rumah Expo99” thread, where the topic is a housing development scheme, there is constant switching back and forth between Malay and English NPs referring to this housing scheme, throughout the whole thread of sixteen postings. Thus the initial posting (2.1, ML-M) refers to ‘Projek rumah expo atu’ (‘that Expo housing project’), but in the reply (posting 2.3) in monolingual English it is taken up as “Expo House 99”. The third posting (2.4, ML-E) refers to “the housing expo” and “the Expo thingy”, and these Malay and English phrases recur throughout this thread.

These patterns, of both maintenance and alternation of key lexical expressions related to the message topic illustrate the choices available to Malay-English bilingual text producers. They can be viewed as strong evidence that participants are writing for a fully bilingual Bruneian online community, of which they are members. There is an assumption on the part of text producers that content words, both in Malay and in English, will be fully understood and accessible. There are very few examples of parallel, in-text translation. It seems that the discussion forums are not intended for ‘outsiders’, as no allowances are made for non-Malay speakers, but neither are the majority of postings accessible to monolingual Brunei Malay speakers. The findings showing no strong relationship between topic and language choice (+ or – alternation) further support this view.

## **Discussion**

The findings from this study can be situated within ongoing debates in the field of code-switching and LA research. Myers Scotton (2002, pp. 59-61) insists that there is always inequality between the matrix and embedded languages in codemixed environments. Jacobson (2001a, pp. 63-69), following Bentahila and Davies (1998), claims that there can also be language alternation in which both languages play an equal role, and offers evidence of this from Malay-English code switching in Malaysia. The corpus of CMC texts analysed here shows both these patterns. Whilst most texts in the corpus show a predominance of one or other language, a substantial minority show intricate patterns of alternation, with some texts showing equal

language alternation, in which meaning is constructed through the use of both grammars at sentence-, group- and even at word-level (e.g. “*memban*” in example 11] above).

As shown in both the statistical overview of the whole corpus of 211 texts, and in the analysis of alternation across a range of grammatical categories, alternation occurs to varying degrees, from none whatsoever in the Malay-only and English-only postings, to the multiple intrasentential alternations exemplified in the text (2.58) in example [1] above.

Further sociolinguistic analysis of the reasons for the language choices made by Bruneian online forum participants lies beyond the scope of this paper. The increased intranational role of English in the Bruneian speech community, exemplified by the adoption of English- and Malay-medium education under the bilingual policy, in place since 1985, is clearly a major factor here. This has led to the emergence of a bilingual discourse community with high levels of proficiency in both Malay and English, a prerequisite for the production of texts showing intricate patterns of LA.

### **Conclusion**

Regularities, rather than hard-and-fast rules, can be stated in the framework of a ‘weakened’ version of Myers Scotton’s Matrix-Language-Frame theory. This identifies a ‘main’ language at the level of each individual posting text, rather than a matrix language at the level of the “projection of complementizer” as proposed by Myers Scotton. These regularities cannot claim to be predictive beyond the basic level of observational accuracy, and arise as a result of the high propensity for congruence of Malay and English syntactic categories, noted by Sebba (1998, p.18).

If the MLF approach is thus modified to one which determines the main language of texts showing a measure of language alternation, this facilitates analysis both at the level of the clause or syntactic group and, at the discursal level, of the whole text. It also allows for intertextual analysis of a corpus of texts belonging to the same genre and from the same domain.

Both the regularities and the variability are also attributable to the medium of online discussion forum postings in which the texts appear. The important role played by this CMC medium becomes even more apparent in the analysis of discursal features,

such as lexical cohesive ties within and between postings. Unlike in face-to-face conversational interaction, participants have access to all that has gone before, simply by scrolling down through previous postings in the thread in order to view the lexical choices made by previous message posters.

To address directly the question posed in the paper title, the partnership is unequal in terms of the language choice in the whole corpus, as shown by the predominance of English-only texts in the figures in Table 1. There is much evidence to support the asymmetrical matrix language and embedded language formulation of Myers Scotton (1993). Yet there is also sufficient evidence of texts showing equal language alternation, and of mixed groups in which both languages contribute to the grammatical framework. These demonstrate that the Bruneian bilingual participants in the online discussion forums are able to choose between any of the five categories of language choice, and to use the grammatical systems of both Malay and English in their text construction.

Jacobson's claim about the predominance of Malay head-modifier word order in NPs (2001, p.189) has been further investigated, and is not supported by the evidence from this corpus of CMC texts: in fact there are almost twice as many examples of English modifier-head NP structure.

The first research question, "How much language alternation occurs in the postings, as opposed to monolingual texts?", has been answered through the overview of language choice and the classification of the 211 postings in the corpus into five distinct categories, showing a near-even split between monolingual and mixed-language texts.

The second research question - "How is the language alternation achieved?" - has been addressed through analysis and discussion of three areas where the grammars of Malay and English are non-congruent. This shows that at the level of the syntactic group there is variability in the extent to which English and Malay dominate. Whilst there is evidence to support the asymmetric MLF model, there is also evidence showing the operation of both grammatical systems, termed equal language alternation.

In the CMC domain text producers are able to plan, draft and redraft their text before posting it online. Hence one might expect greater separation of the languages. Yet there is a substantial amount of LA, with 50% of the posting texts showing some measure of alternation. This is accomplished through the text producers' high levels of bilingual proficiency, which facilitates language alternation.

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### Note

- 1: Transcription and glossing conventions used in this paper:  
English text is in *italics*.  
Citation from the online discussion forum postings is verbatim.  
“-2”, in the top line of text following nouns, signals reduplication of the noun (e.g. barang2 = barang-barang, ‘things’)  
Numbers following the free translation indicate the posting in the corpus from which the example is taken.  
/ \ : slash and backslash marks denote English> Malay and Malay>English code switches, numbered within full-text extracts

### Abbreviations used in the interlinear glosses

1s	first-person singular pronoun
1pi	first-person plural inclusive pronoun
1pe	first-person plural exclusive pronoun
3s	third-person singular pronoun
3p	third-person plural pronoun
AV	active verb
ABBR	abbreviation
DEM	demonstrative
DM	discourse particle / marker
FUT	future
IMP	imperative
INT	interrogative particle / marker
PASS	passive
POSS	possessive
RDP	reduplication
REL	relative

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*Biodata:*

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### **Abstract in French & Spanish:**

#### **Lorsque deux grammaires coïncident: L'alternance entre le malais et l'anglais dans les salons de discussion publics sur l'Internet.**

L'alternance codique entre l'anglais et le malais est un sujet assez bien recherché. Cependant, il y a très peu d'études sur cette alternance dans le contexte de la communication électronique.

Cet article présente les résultats des recherches sur l'utilisation du malais et de l'anglais par les Brunéiens qui participent en deux salons de discussion asynchroniques.

L'article porte sur deux questions de recherche:

- combien d'alternance se manifeste dans les textes, par opposition aux textes unilingues;
- comment cette alternance s'accomplit, dans les domaines où le malais et l'anglais montrent un manque de congruence grammaticale.

La première question est abordée par l'analyse de choix de langue dans un corpus de textes tiré de deux salons de discussion Brunéiens. Les résultats révèlent une division à peu près égale entre les textes unilingues (soit en malais soit en anglais), et les textes mélangés.

Pour la deuxième question, l'article analyse trois domaines spécifiques où la grammaire du malais et celle de l'anglais sont incompatibles: l'ordre des constituants dans les phrases nominales, et la morphologie inflexionnelle nominale et verbale.

Les conclusions de cette enquête se rapportent aux débats théoriques des chercheurs dans le domaine :

- si le rôle des deux langues est toujours asymétrique, où une langue fournit le cadre grammatical et l'autre le contenu lexical, ou autrement,
- si les deux langues peuvent contribuer également à la structure grammaticale et au contenu lexical du texte.

#### **Cuando dos gramáticas coinciden: el cambio de código malayo inglés en los textos de web de comentario público**

Aunque ha habido gran cantidad de investigación acerca del cambio de código malayo inglés, hasta ahora poca investigación ha sido llevada a cabo respecto al cambio en foros públicos de web.

Esta ponencia descubre los resultados de una investigación corriente sobre el uso del malayo e inglés bruneano en los mismos foros.

En esta misma investigación se plantean dos cuestiones:

- La ocurrencia del cambio de código en los mensajes web a diferencia de los textos monolingües;

- Cómo se manifiesta el cambio en zonas donde el malayo y el inglés demuestran una falta de congruencia.

Nos dirigimos a la primera cuestión mediante un análisis de selección de lengua en un cuerpo de textos web de Brunei. Los resultados demuestran un promedio casi igual entre textos monolingües y éstos que representan una medida de cambio de código.

Con respecto a la segunda cuestión, esta ponencia investiga tres instancias en las cuales los subsistemas gramaticales del malayo y el inglés demuestran una falta de congruencia: el orden constituyente de frase sustantivo, y la morfología inflexional sustantival y verbal.

La sección de comentarios relaciona los resultados con argumentos de los teóricos del cambio de código: si el papel de las lenguas en el cambio de código es siempre asimétrico, en el cual uno de los idiomas proporciona el marco gramatical y el otro, morfemas de contenido, o si bien los dos idiomas contribuyen en igual medida a la estructura gramatical y el entendimiento del texto.